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THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

Letter dated 20 November 1996 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to refer to resolution 50/88 B on the situation in Afghanistan, which was adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 1995, in particular to paragraphs 3 and 4 of that resolution.

In accordance with those paragraphs, I invited a group of 19 regional and other interested Member States, together with the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), to a one-day meeting of consultation in New York on 18 November 1996. The purposes of the meeting were twofold: to brief the participants on the United Nations current efforts in Afghanistan in the political, humanitarian and developmental fields; and to discuss with them what more they could do to support those efforts, with special reference to the conclusion of a ceasefire and the initiation of a political process leading to a negotiated settlement of the conflict.

The Member States invited were China, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Japan, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Uzbekistan.

All participants made substantive contributions to the debate and a pleasing degree of consensus was revealed. The message that the meeting sent to the Afghan parties was clear. This well-informed and influential group of countries unanimously expressed their conviction that there was no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. They wanted an immediate ceasefire, which in the view of almost all of them should include the demilitarization of Kabul. They wanted the Afghan parties to join in a genuine effort to find a political settlement to their conflict. They expressed their readiness to join in coordinated international efforts to help the Afghan parties to achieve this.

All the participants said that the present situation could not be allowed to continue. It was intolerable in terms of the suffering it imposed on the Afghan people. It was also intolerable in the threats that it presented to the region and the world: the threats of regional destabilization, of drugs, of terrorism, of illegal arms flows.

The participants also reaffirmed the principles enshrined in General Assembly resolution 50/88 B, namely respect for Afghanistan's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity; the need for the Afghan parties to negotiate a political settlement that would respect the rights of all groups, including their human rights; and an end to foreign interference, especially through the supply of arms. And they reaffirmed support for the kind of peace process outlined in paragraph 4 of resolution 50/88 B.

All the participants confirmed that the United Nations had a central role to play in helping the Afghan parties define and implement a peace process, in close consultation with OIC, whose efforts should be complementary to those of the United Nations. They were unanimous in their appreciation of the efforts of the Special Mission under the leadership of Mr. Norbert Holl, especially his current efforts to bring about a ceasefire in and around Kabul, and pledged their continued support for those efforts. I was particularly encouraged that they responded positively to my call for close coordination between their own mediating efforts and those of the United Nations.

In my summing up at the end of the meeting I was able to conclude that the delegations present had responded positively on a number of key issues. They had indicated that they would use their influence with the various factions to persuade them to give up the military option and join in the common search for a negotiated peace. They had given a positive response to my request that countries with influence in Afghanistan should be ready, individually or collectively, to help the United Nations efforts when the United Nations so requests. Most expressed the view that it would be useful for the group to continue to meet informally from time to time and at various levels. There was also widespread support for the idea that in due course an international conference should be convened to support negotiations and endorse their results. A number of delegations offered to host such a conference and/or earlier direct negotiations between the Afghan parties.

Participants also showed a keen interest in collective action to curb or halt the flow of arms and ammunition into Afghanistan. Some suggested that the Wassenaar regime for the point of origin control of conventional weapons transfers could be useful in this context. Others favoured a formal arms embargo by the Security Council.

The participants were unanimous in their desire to alleviate the suffering which the Afghan conflict imposes on the ordinary people of that country. A number of them also shared my view that the promise of a major international effort to reconstruct Afghanistan when peace was restored could itself be an important incentive to the faction leaders to negotiate a peace settlement.

I conclude that this meeting was a useful first gathering of a group of countries that are particularly well placed to support the efforts of the

Secretary-General to carry out the mandates entrusted to him by the General Assembly and the Security Council. It is my intention to convene further informal meetings of the group from time to time.

I should be grateful if you would convey this information to the members of the General Assembly, under agenda item 39.

(Signed) Boutros BOUTROS-GHALI